Graduate Program Strategic Perspectives

Managing graduate programs is a team effort. While the Graduate Program Director (GPD) may be the point person, a program’s strategic trajectories depend on direction, support and resources from the college’s Dean’s Office and website team, the Provost’s Office, the College of Graduate and Professional Education, and KSU StratComm.

GPDs along with deans/associate deans, administrators, and CGPE staff should together consider responses to the questions below. However, these are not easy questions to answer. The world of graduate education is changing rapidly and KSU is itself continually morphing, challenging the shelf life of any current strategic decisions. Further, colleges will be forced to negotiate the trade-offs that are always apparent whenever resources are limited.

As such, the goal of posing the questions below is not to ask GPDs to develop encompassing, long-term strategic plans, which are not realistic given our circumstances. The goal is to create a level of agreement among decision makers about the footings, allocations and activities that form the foundation of success in any graduate program.

Program Status

- **Mission/Vision/Goals.** How does the college/program communicate the core purpose and aspirations of this program and its portfolio of graduate programs?

- **Curriculum Updates.** When was the last time the program curriculum and the individual courses were reviewed and/or updated? When is the next review scheduled? Are new modalities possible (e.g., (a)synchronous online)?

- **Student Profile.** How many students does your program have? What are their demographics? How many classes do they take in an average term, and how long does it take them to graduate? Where do they live and work, before, during and after the program? Why do students drop out?

- **Faculty Availability.** Does your college/department/program have at least two people who can teach each required course?

- **Budget Analysis.** How much does your college/program spend on items such as marketing and recruiting, administrative assistance, and faculty stipends and releases?

Competitive Conditions

- **Student School-Choice Criteria:** On what considerations are students selecting graduate programs in your field?

- **First-Circle Competing Programs.** If a potential student decides not to come attend KSU, what are their most prevalent next-choice options? How are those programs similar to and distinct from our program?

- **Target Student Profile.** What characteristics do your most successful students share?

- **Marketing.** How does your college/program market itself?
Program Projections

- **Enrollment Goals.** Is your college/program meeting its enrollment goals both in terms of number of students and quality of students? How is your college/program using waivers, TAP and GRAs? (Note: there is a direct correlation between available resources and increases in enrollment and decreases in discounts.)

- **Evolution of the Field.** What do employers value in graduates from programs like yours? How are demands from employers changing?

- **Faculty Initiatives.** How can your college/program provide more and better opportunities for faculty career development?

- **Resource Requests.** What are the next three forms of support your college/program would request from the Dean’s Office, the Provost’s Office, CGPE, or StratComm?

Operational Considerations (Key Questions arising from GPD Guidelines)

- **Program Marketing/Recruiting.** What initiatives is your program utilizing to increase the number of students, the quality of the students, or the profile of the program? Does your program hold Information Sessions, or have video-based information for prospective students at its web site or on YouTube? How does your program manage student inquiries, especially in cooperation with the Office of Graduate Admissions?

- **Admissions Decisions Processes.** How does your program make admissions decisions? How long does an applicant wait to learn an admission decision? Are the students notified upon completing an application of when they will hear back?

- **Student Communication.** After a student has been admitted, how does the program secure commitment to attending KSU and prepare the student for the first day of classes? Does the program offer an orientation and/or assistance creating a first-term schedule? Does the program provide the student with a handbook (physical or electronic)?

- **Student Retention.** Does the program’s current and projected schedule of courses facilitate a student’s ability to efficiently move through the program? Does the program offer advising?

- **Graduates/Alumni.** Does the program have a method for staying in touch with graduates?